

February 18, 2016

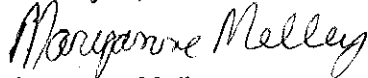
Dear Committee on Insurance and Real Estate,

I am writing to you to request the removal of guide dogs and any reference to the blind in Raised Bill 35. Once a person is determined to be blind or legally blind they are sent to the state agency DORS-BESB for rehabilitation where they receive mobility training. This training allows a blind person to travel independently. Some blind people choose guide dogs for their mobility and others choose a long white cane. Therefore the dog and the cane should be looked at as one in the same. Health insurance does not pay for long white canes and should not pay for guide dogs. Guide dogs, much like the long white cane are not considered a medical necessity because they do not help detect or correct a medical condition.

I am a guide dog user and have been for the past 11 years. The school I attended was free of charge. Some schools charge a minimum fee ranging from \$50.00 to \$150.00. My transportation, room and board and the dog were all paid for by Guide Dogs for the Blind. The dog trainers and student instructors must go to school to become certified for their jobs. Many of these schools have been in place since the 1920's they are nonprofit organizations funded philanthropically. It costs approximately \$50,000.00 just to train one dog; this does not include travel, room and board for the student. The insurance companies are not professionals in this field and should not be determining who should and should not get a guide dog. Another concern with their involvement is that guide dog schools may lose funding from their donors if they feel health insurance will be paying for the expense of training a guide dog.

Therefore it is very important that guide dogs and any assistance animals for the blind be removed from the language of Raised Bill 35. The original writing of this bill did not include guide dogs. **"We fully realize that guide dogs are not a medical necessity, but a personal decision— and, in fact, that is why we specifically did NOT include guide dogs in the original proposal."** per Senator Bartolomeo's office May 22, 2015.

Thank you,



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